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Voting for Bloodshed

Members of the House who are unwilling to face "soft on Communism" charges in next fall's election apparently will give the Administration a victory this week on the issue of military aid to the "contras" in Nicaragua. But those who cast an important vote for such a sorry reason may hear some tough questions from concerned voters.

What, for example, will be the real effect of sending more weapons to a stateless army organized by the Central Intelligence Agency to carry on an insurgency against a Government even the Reagan Administration recognizes?

In The Washington Post for April 13, Henry Kissinger details the dubious answer promoted by those who favor the aid: the contras need it in order to keep military pressure on the Sandinista Government of Nicaragua, and only under such pressures will the Marxist Sandinistas accept a negotiated settlement in Central America.

Dr. Kissinger notes correctly that the Administration's description of the threat posed by the Sandinistas "logically implies the need to overthrow" their regime, but that the aid proposed for the contras is "clearly inadequate to this or perhaps any other goal." And, he adds, President Reagan's repeated denials that the use of American troops is even a possibility also "underlines the incompatibility of rhetoric and policy."

That points, Dr. Kissinger thinks, to "a combination of negotiation and pressure designed to deprive the Sandinista regime of the capability to subvert or to undermine its neighbors." In fact, "contra pressures supply the indispensable incentive" for the Sandinistas to enter negotiations.

For that happy eventuality, Dr. Kissinger provides a seven-point program, including Sandinista agreement to end their "special relationship" with Cuba and the Soviet Union, and to renounce loans and credits from the East bloc in return for help from the West. The Nicaraguan Government would agree to send home its Cuban, Soviet, Libyan "and other radical advisers," and begin a "process of reconciliation" with the insurgents. With the other Central American governments, it would cut the size of its armed forces to the levels of 1979, when the Sandinistas took power.

In other words, "contra pressures supply the indispensable incentive" for the Sandinistas to abandon what they consider their revolution, accept Washington's demands, and give up power. Dr. Kissinger does not explain — not even he could — the practical

difference, for the Sandinistas, between such a negotiated settlement and the military overthrow of their Government.

If the Sandinistas did accept Dr. Kissinger's terms, what would become of the contra leaders whose pressures are so indispensable? Would they return to their plowshares and Coca-Cola plants like good democrats, or would they expect to take over the government in Managua? Would the Ortega brothers welcome Arturo Cruz back to the regime he once served but now has taken up arms to oppose? Would a process of reconciliation place officers of the Somoza National Guard, now fighting with the contras, in command of the reduced armed forces?

In the real world, of course, the Sandinistas are no more likely than

Kissinger's case for aid to the 'contras' in Nicaragua

any other government to negotiate their own overthrow and replacement. And to the extent that some issues might be negotiable with them — for example, the departure of Cuban, Soviet and other "radical advisers" — it's not at all clear that the best way to get there from here is through military pressures by the contras.

It's just as logical that a stepped-up contra war would give Managua reason to believe it needs those advisers, and other forms of East bloc help, more than ever. And if the terms advanced by Dr. Kissinger are all they have to look forward to, aren't they likely to react with increased military efforts of their own?

The hard truth is that there's only one way to install in Nicaragua the kind of government wanted by the Administration and Henry Kissinger: that's to throw the Sandinistas out. Mr. Reagan doesn't have the political support at home or abroad to do it directly; and nobody thinks \$100 million will enable the contras to do it indirectly. Members of Congress who vote to send them that money are voting, therefore, to increase bloodshed and destruction in Central America, not to settle its problems.